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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 001963

SIPDIS

AF/S FOR BNEULING
NSC FOR SENIOR AFRICA DIRECTOR C. COURVILLE

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [ZI](#)

SUBJECT: ZIMBABWE'S CRICKET DIPLOMACY

REF: (A) HARARE 1913 (B) HARARE 1770 (C) HARARE 882

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher W. Dell under Section 1.5 b/d

[11](#). (C) SUMMARY: A visit by England's cricket team is exposing conflicts inside the ruling party and may evidence further impetus within the GOZ to moderate its anti-Western posture. The GOZ's decision to admit 13 originally barred journalists to cover the tour suggests the waning influence of Information Jonathan Moyo and coincides with curious contemplation in the official press of possible rapprochement with the UK. END SUMMARY.

[12](#). (U) The English cricket team arrived in Zimbabwe November 26 for a ten-day, four match tour. The controversial tour appeared to be derailed just days before its originally scheduled commencement November 24 when the team refused to travel in response to the GOZ's barring of 13 British journalists from entering the country to cover the matches. After reportedly heavy lobbying by the director of the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB), the Information Ministry reversed itself and announced that the journalists would be permitted to enter the country to cover the matches, but "not to meddle in the politics of Zimbabwe." The journalists reportedly were going to be required to sign statements upon entry undertaking not to stray from sports themes in their reporting, but we are unaware that they were asked to do so or actually did so. Indeed, we understand that the Sky News crew has been reporting on the ZANU-PF Party Congress underway this week. The cricket boards reportedly are continuing to spar over who will bear losses associated with the cancellation of one match as a result of the delayed entry.

[13](#). (U) Articles in The Independent and the Daily Mirror portrayed the Ministry's volte face as a defeat for combative Information Minister Moyo engineered by ZANU-PF Secretary for Information Nathan Shamuyarira. According to press reports, Shamuyarira overruled the Ministry in order to avoid an embarrassing the GOZ with a cancellation of the publicized tour. The official press reported nothing about the flip-flopping and announced only that all 78 of the journalists applying to cover the tour had been accredited. Focused principally on sports themes, official Zimbabwean coverage of the tour featured English players' positive comments about Zimbabwe and occasionally contrasted this visit with last year's tour, which was cancelled over purported security concerns.

[14](#). (U) Much more eyebrow-raising was an unrelated Herald op-ed piece the same date, "Jack Straw's handshake turns into an olive branch," in which the rabidly anti-Western columnist Donald Charumbira lays out evidence of purported UK interest in "burying the hatchet" with the GOZ. Charumbira argues that the UK has accepted the inevitability of ZANU-PF rule and needs better relations with all countries, including Zimbabwe, to advance larger priorities such as Iraq and the Middle East. He forecasts British attempts at harmonization but warns that "clandestine machinations" will continue and that the UK would shift efforts from the MDC to "tackling ZANU-PF from within." The ZANU-PF-aligned but unofficial Daily Mirror published an article on November 24 that gave prominent play to the British Ambassador's urging of more cordial bilateral ties.

[15](#). (C) A British diplomat here confirmed to poloff that HMG did not support the cricket tour but had protested the barring of the journalists. An unnamed minister in London had called in the Zimbabwean charge in London and the British DCM visited working level counterparts at MFA here to express displeasure and to urge a policy reversal. The British diplomat attributed the reversal, however, not to the demarche but to anti-Moyo sentiments within the Government and Mugabe's strong desire to have the cricket tour. Commenting on the Charumbira piece, the diplomat reiterated that HMG had not changed its Zimbabwe policy at all but that the new British Ambassador's more outgoing style might be "puzzling" the GOZ.

COMMENT

16. (C) Shamuyarira's reported triumph over Moyo, if true, reprises his successful contest with the mercurial Information Minister over the admission of a Sky News team to interview President Mugabe (ref C) in May. It is one of several indicia that Moyo's influence finally may be running out. He is a candidate to be scapegoated over party divisions and rancor that flowed from a meeting he reportedly assembled to thwart the Joyce Mujuru Vice-Presidential bid last month (septel). We are hearing growing rumors that the President himself, on whose favor Moyo had relied for so long, is dissatisfied with Moyo's divisiveness and plans to sack him from the cabinet after the election. Certainly there are many in the ruling party who would welcome his departure from the scene, but predictions of the adept bureaucratic operator's imminent political demise now have proven no more than wishful thinking for more than a year.

17. (C) The GOZ's reversal on the journalists' accreditation contrasts with the hard line shown just last month in deporting the COSATU delegation (ref B) and suggests the growing ascendancy of more outward oriented elements in the ruling party. Certainly, the GOZ is being more attentive to its international image and is trying to convey a sense of growing normalcy to domestic audiences. We expect the UK will continue to be the regime's principal bogeyman through the elections (ref A), but the Charumbira piece may foreshadow a softening after that.

DELL